# AMERICAN ALMANACS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY DAVID D. DENKER

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I WANT TO STATE frankly that this estimate of American almanacs is fragmentary. The reason for publication is the hope of influencing scholars to turn their attention to materials that do not come readily to mind as an historical source. Though the Rutgers collection is by no means complete it may serve to turn our attention from barren areas of research to a type of publication that recorded contemporary history and reflected popular sentiment. With this purpose most readers will sympathize.

For most of the period I have relied largely on the collection in the library of Rutgers University, one which rivals the best in size, value and importance. Not so strong perhaps in the seventeenth century issues, the library possesses a fine collection of almanacs prior to and after the Revolution. As a result I have examined a total of 3,902 almanacs, comprising 302 issues before 1800, 1,350 issues between 1800 and 1850 and 2,250 between 1850 and 1949. The files of the long series of issues—a collection of much value and importance—could well be the subject of special study by students of history, American civilization, economics, art, and journalism.

The collection contains a number of issues that have a certain historical value. The earliest item is "The Almanack of the Coelistial Motions" issued in 1718. No collection would be complete without the Franklin almanacs which started the vogue in America with the Poor Richards. Poor Richard's almanacs were a success from the start in 1733. In the Rutgers Library there is a facsimile of the first issue of 1733, and originals published in 1756, 1757, and 1765. In

the same vein was Poor Robin's Almanack, which was issued in Rhode Island in 1728 by the first printer in that state, James Franklin, brother of Benjamin. Others like Poor Richard abound in the collection, such as "Beers' Almanack and Ephemeris" of 1794, "An Astronomical Diary" of 1758, and "The Federal Almanack and Ephemeris" of 1791. The last was the work of Father Abraham Hutchins, a mathematician, and was printed in New Brunswick.

Particularly valuable for the early history of the country are the annuals of Nathaniel Ames, the most illustrious of the almanac-makers of the eighteenth century. At his death in 1764, his work was continued to 1775 by his son, Nathaniel. The Ames almanacs for 1742, 1745, 1746, 1750-1754, 1756, 1758-1760, 1762-1765, 1767-1774 are especially rewarding. The first work of this famous almanac-maker, physician, and innkeeper preceded Poor Richard by eight years. Ames seemed to be prolific in his field and made his publications "best sellers" by interspersing them with poetry and prose. He also made his readers familiar with English writers, such as Addison, Pope, Dryden, Butler and Milton.

For example, in the 1752 issue Ames's semi-serious calendar contains imitations of Dryden and Juvenal, with such entries as

JANUARY

Of all the Views, the first and chief Request
Of each, is to be richer than the rest:
And yet no Doubts the poor Man's Draught controul,
He dreads no Poison in his homely Bowl:
Then fear the deadly Drug when Gems divine
Enchase the Cup, and sparkle in the Wine.

Ames can versify handsomely enough, and bring things to a happy finish where the necessity of making a couplet with the help of Addison does not prohibit sense—for example,

SEPTEMBER

My Son with those never consent to go
Who All their Greatness to their Meanness owe;
*'When Vice prevails, and impious Men bear sway,'*
Rather than be as meanly great as they,
Contented live and die without a Name,
'Till God's decisive Day reveals thy Fame.

A conspicuous contribution toward the understanding of the Germans in the colonies and the young nation is "Der Hoch-Deutsche

Americanische Calender," published at Germantown by Christop Saur. The issue, which first appeared in 1738 and continued until after 1800, would be basic for a study of early America. In addition to giving brief sketches, bits of history and lore, the almanac is copiously illustrated. In 1743 Saur designed a title page which was used for many years. The collection in Rutgers includes the annuals for 1754, 1766, and 1771. It is only natural that the collection should have examples of "Father Abraham's Almanack." The first of the famous Weatherwise series was printed in 1759 in Philadelphia. Like "Der Hoch-Deutsche Americanische Calender" the Weatherwise series affords excellent sources of issues filled with wood-cuts of merit. One of the regular features of the almanac were the calculations made by David Rittenhouse, a noted astronomer. The issues of John N. Hutchins contain calendar pictures, and such reading matter as patriotic views mingled with practical hints as to the proper time and method for planting, cultivating and harvesting. This series began in 1742, and the issue of 1761 contains an excellent wood-cut of Montreal. Others consulted include the Hutchins' series for 1765, 1766, and 1767. A useful reflection of subjects, attitudes and themes of the times may be found in Nathaniel Low's almanac for 1767 and 1777. And one of the very best for the period is Bickerstaff's publication for 1774 and 1783. These almanacs are so well known that it is unnecessary to enumerate the types of information they contain. Here Bickerstaff's (the name was borrowed from Dean Swift) offers many excellent wood-cuts which are powerful and moving. As a matter of fact, its illustrations were imitated or pirated by other publications.

Almanacs were surely publications of prime importance second only to the Bible. Although they were primarily useful for their astronomical information, they later gained prominence for containing intelligence useful to every farmer. Along with the records of the Courts and of general spiritual activities, the almanacs printed useful information on the weather, tides, eclipses, and medicinal remedies. Encyclopedic in information, they were often the only reading matter of the farmer. Historical writing occupies little space, but the annuals have made larger contributions to American thought than might be expected. Few have expressed so fully the national mind or have disseminated so many influential ideas as, say, Nathaniel Ames before the close of the Seven Years War or Nathaniel

Low in his patriotic appeals on the eve of the Revolution. Most of the history was written with an instructional aim, and little of it rose to a level which would allow it to receive a place in American historiography. Nevertheless, it does reflect with some accuracy changes in temper, cultural attitudes and interest.

## 1. ALMANACS AND HISTORY

In history there is a tendency to interpret the American Revolution in terms of economics and ideology—of mercantilism and the Stamp Act, of the Enlightenment and Locke—and to attribute the actions of Americans to such causes. This point of view explains in part, though only in part, that the powerful humanitarian impulses of the Enlightenment, made explicit to many Americans through the writings of the English empirical philosophers, were an incentive to develop an American democracy in which the shackles of class inequity had been cast off. That the influence of these philosophers upon the Republic has generally been exaggerated, however, especially by those eager to believe that their writings were the fountainhead from which the sentiments of liberty were imbibed, is noted in this colloquy between an historian and a man who fought in the Revolution:

"Captain Preston, why did you go to the Concord fight, the 19th of April, 1775?" The old man, bowed beneath the weight of years, raised himself upright, and turning to me said: "Why did I go?" "Yes," I replied: "My histories tell me that you men of the Revolution took up arms against 'intolerable oppressions.' " "What were they? Oppressions? I didn't feel them." "What, were you not oppressed by the Stamp Act?" "I never saw one of those stamps and always understood that Governor Bernard put them all in Castle William. I am certain I never paid a penny for one of them." "Well, what then about the tea-tax?" "Tea-tax! I never drank a drop of the stuff; the boys threw it all overboard." "*Then I suppose you had been reading Harrington or Sidney and Locke about the eternal principles of liberty.*" [My italics] "Never heard of 'em. We read only the Bible, the Catechism, Watt's Psalms and Hymns and the Almanack." "Well, then, what was the matter? and what did you mean in going to the fight?" "Young man, what we meant in going for those red-coats was this: we always had governed ourselves and we always meant to. They didn't mean that we should."[1]

Yet if almanacs did not foster the attitude that American democracy was the logical outcome of Locke's lucubrations, the best al-

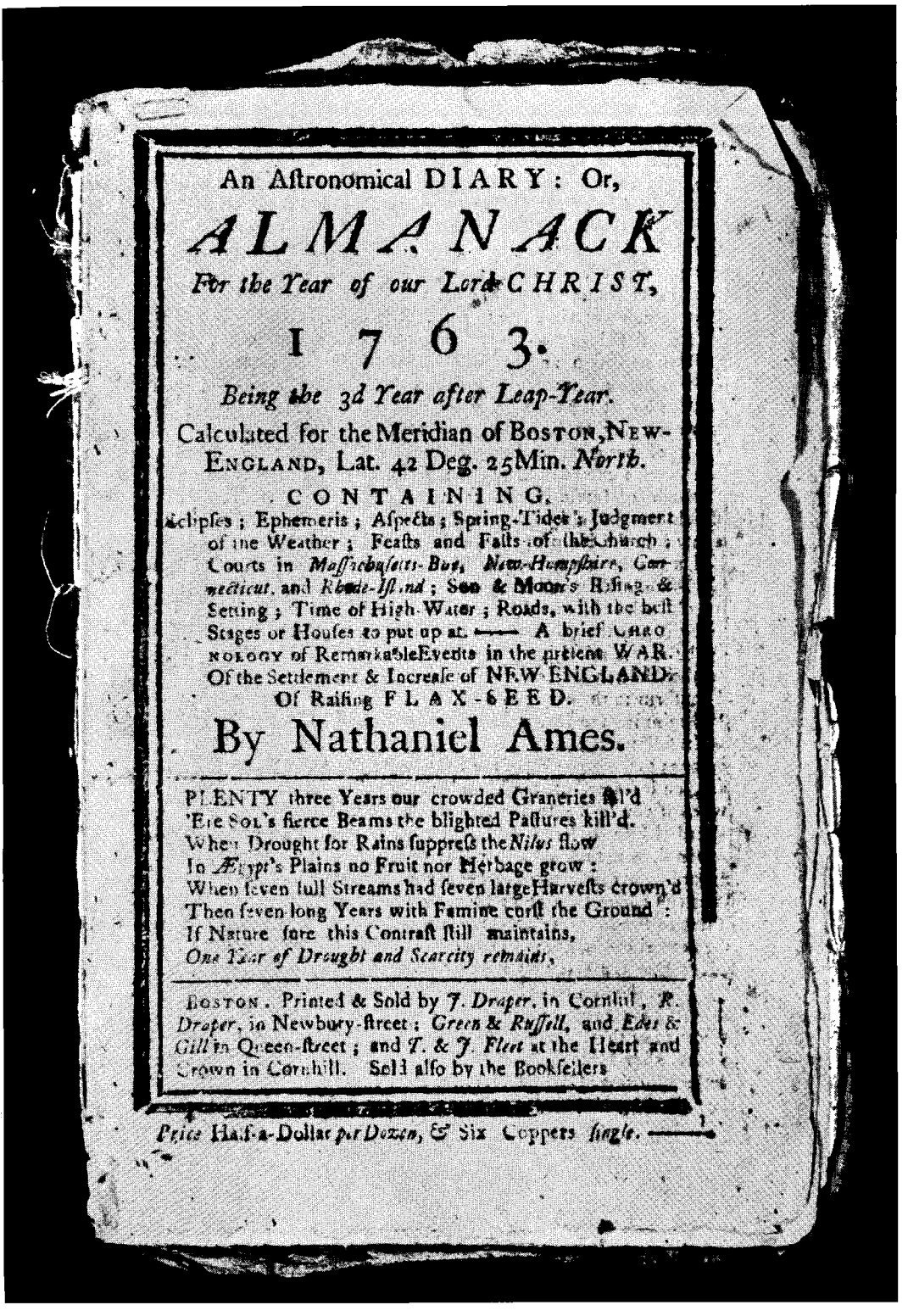
[1] Mellen Chamberlain *John Adams, The Statesman of The American Revolution* (148-149), 1898.

manacs carefully dunned the pages of the Enlightenment and many of the phrases of Locke, which the latter originally had developed in his justification of the principles of the Revolution of 1688. But the philosophers and their effect upon history should be estimated in the setting of their own time. In eighteenth century England the great forces promoting social upheaval were capitalism and machine technology, radical Christianity, science, overseas trade and the struggle for colonies, and the secular and rational ideas of the Enlightenment. The empirical philosophers of this period attempted only to understand or to rationalize, to originate or guide, them. They took their ideas already present in the cultural air, as it were, and gave them specific formulation and clarification. When these had been framed in abstract doctrines, they came to have an independent career; and later, when American almanac readers came upon them, to give shape to the ideals and values they already felt and were groping for. The forces which sustained the expansion of American democracy arose mainly within the culture. They were felt most poignantly, after all, by the common people who did not read the philosophers, but who knew, however, for what their hearts yearned. In this connection the annuals of Nathaniel Ames are the most interesting, being marked in the characteristic appeals of liberty. They deserve special study.

The general use of Lockean doctrines placed into currency such sentiments as the essential equality of all men, who have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and these ideas were more frequently expressed in political than in literary output. But Ames' lines to April (1762) betrayed his knowledge of the Enlightenment:

> APRIL
>
> In *India's* Woods the Parrot builds her Nest,
> With Plumage of the gayest Tinctures drest:
> Sweet docile Bird whose imitating Tongue,
> In Words distinct repeats its mimic Song;
> Discourse too with Reason thro' the whole,
> And shows the Wisdom of its little Soul.

And in 1769, when New Hampshire alone stayed aloof from non-importation, Ames proclaimed America's declaration of intellectual independence. The gulf between the intellectual and cultural attitudes of the colonies and England was wide, but Ames foresaw the



An Aſtronomical DIARY: Or,

# ALMANACK

*For the Year of our Lord* CHRIST,

# 1763.

*Being the 3d Year after Leap-Year.*

Calculated for the Meridian of BOSTON, NEW-ENGLAND, Lat. 42 Deg. 25 Min. *North.*

CONTAINING,

Eclipſes; Ephemeris; Aſpects; Spring-Tides; Judgment of the Weather; Feaſts and Faſts of the Church; Courts in *Maſſachuſetts-Bay*, *New-Hampſhire*, *Connecticut*, and *Rhode-Iſland*; Sun & Moon's Riſing & Setting; Time of High-Water; Roads, with the beſt Stages or Houſes to put up at. —— A brief CHRONOLOGY of Remarkable Events in the preſent WAR. Of the Settlement & Increaſe of NEW-ENGLAND. Of Raiſing FLAX-SEED.

## By Nathaniel Ames.

PLENTY three Years our crowded Graneries fill'd
'Ere Sol's fierce Beams the blighted Paſtures kill'd.
When Drought for Rains ſuppreſs the *Nilus* flow
In *Egypt*'s Plains no Fruit nor Herbage grow:
When ſeven full Streams had ſeven large Harveſts crown'd
Then ſeven long Years with Famine curſt the Ground:
If Nature ſure this Contraſt ſtill maintains,
*One Year of Drought and Scarcity remains*,

BOSTON. Printed & Sold by *J. Draper*, in Cornhill, *R. Draper*, in Newbury-ſtreet; *Green & Ruſſell*, and *Edes & Gill* in Queen-ſtreet; and *T. & J. Fleet* at the Heart and Crown in Cornhill. Sold alſo by the Bookſellers

*Price* Half-a-Dollar *per Dozen*, & Six Coppers *ſingle*.

THE TITLE-PAGE OF NATHANIEL AMES'S ALMANAC FOR 1763


DER HOCH DEUTSCHE AMERICANISCHE CALENDAR CONTAINED EXTENSIVE ILLUSTRATION OF WHICH THIS IS AN EXAMPLE

grandeur of the Republic and the advent of new Lockes, Newtons, Miltons, and Shakespeares. It is not easy to determine what plain people thought about the idea of the American Scholar, for few had the opportunity or the access to knowledge to express their views. But the student of intellectual history will grasp how Ames may have yearned for a more democratic intellectual culture when he put his ideas on America's future cultural tradition in vigorous verse:

NOVEMBER

Some future Locke with Reason's keenest Ray,
Pierces the rich Font of intellectu'l Day,
The subtil Ties of Complex Thought unbind,
And Fix each Movement of the varying Mind.
Some second Newton trace Creation's Laws,
Through each Dependance to the sov'reign Cause.

Ames took it for granted that he had the natural right to announce in 1774: "As it is unpardonable for a Navigator to be without his charts, so it is for a *Senator* to be without HIS, which is Locke's 'Essay on Government.' " In doing so he expressed a widely held idea.

One result of the pride that patriotism stimulated was Ames' preparation of an estimate of the history and present state of the colonies. His "An Account of the Several Provinces in North America" in his annual for 1756 is one of the first comprehensive treatises upon the topography and natural resources of the colonies and, in my opinion, one of the most useful works published in Colonial America. A compiler as well as an original mind, Ames greatly widened the extent of geographical and historical knowledge among his readers by making available inexpensive as well as relatively comprehensive treatments of pre-Revolutionary America. He concluded with this assessment of the relative strength of the colonies: "Upon the whole, the southern Colonies live with the least Labour; but the Northern Colonies are most Healthy; and the breed and disposition of the *New-England* People, are the most stout and war-like, and deserve the Preference in Military Affairs."

A praiseworthy achievement was the earnest address by *A New-England Man* inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment and influenced by the pride of the colonies in the face of mercantilist pressure. The author evidently tried to check in his almanac of 1768 the

tide of British economic pressure by stripping Locke of abstract doctrines and substituting a storm of criticism of England:

Friends and Country-Men! Our Fathers came into this Wilderness, encouraged by the Word of a King that they should enjoy their Civil & Religious Liberties! They lived upon boil'd Corn and Clams, and laboured hard to clear and cultivate the Country they purchased of the Natives, and defended the same at the Expence of their own Blood and Treasure: We have often aided the Crown with Men and Money; and by the Conquest of Cape-Briton, gave Peace to Europe: Our Taxes, till very lately, have been granted by our own Representatives for the Support of Government; and we have given Old England Millions of Money in the way of Trade: Our growing Extravagancies have run us amazingly into Debt; and the Moneys that should go in Payment, are now to be taken from us, *without our Consent*, to Support, independent of the People, and in greater Affluence, the Officers of the Crown; as also to maintain & keep up a large body of Regular Troops in America. Duties, unknown to our Fathers, to be paid here upon Sugar, Molasses, Wine, Rum, Tea, Coffee, Cocoa, Paper of all kind, Painters Colours, Window and other Glass, &c., will carry off all our Silver and Gold, without other Taxes, which are talk'd of upon Salt & Land, to the Ruin of Trade, and in the end of the whole Province, unless prevented by the Virtue of the People. Boston, has set a noble Example for the Encouragement of Frugality and our own Manufactures, by the Agreement *unanimously* come into; and may it be followed by all the other Towns: Nay, let them go further, by agreeing not to sip that *poisonous Herb*, called Bohea Tea, as also not to purchase any sort of Woolen Goods made abroad, for 12 or 18 Months to come, but to wear their old patch'd Cloaths till our own Manufacture can be bought, as many in New-York, Connecticut and Philadelphia, are now doing.—If this Saving is not made, Interest must rise, Mortgages cannot be cleared, Lands will fall, or be possess'd by *Foreigners*,; Families impoverished, and our Goals filled with unhappy Objects—If these wise Measures should be come into, a whole Province will be saved from Slavery, and this dreadful Ruin, and we shall soon become a FREE, RICH and HAPPY PEOPLE!—That the Things which belong to our political Peace, may not be hid from the Eyes of Americans, as it seems to be from the Eyes of Britons, is the hearty Wish of—

A NEW-ENGLAND MAN

Tom Paine himself might have dictated such a passage!

Finally we come to a longer, more ambitious work by Ames, who must be *listened to* as he sings in 1775 of a bright future and a glorious past. His particular concern with America and its people is noteworthy for its outlook on the colonial past. He seemed to share Jonathan Edwards' conviction that divine power had singled out America "as the glorious renovator of the world." The dream of America

had, of course, to rest on the duty of every American to perform deeds of bravery on the tented field. Take, for example, this treatment of patriotism:

FEBRUARY

And brave alone is he who can sustain
The wild confusion of the bloody plain.
Can death and wounds behold with dire delight,
And shady legions moving to the fight
For he alone a lasting name can raise,
And crown his early years with martial praise,
Who in the front of battle stands unmov'd
The bulwark of the country which he lov'd.

One who is well acquainted with the beginnings of American nationalism will recognize the dramatic element. No better evidence of this vein will be found than these lines to May (1775):

MAY

Who never from the field of battle flies,
But for his children and his country dies
Ne'er shall his glory fade, or cease his fame
Tho' laid in dust, immortal is his name.
But if the sable hand of death he shun,
Returning victor with his glory won.

Ames' awareness of a divided society has much of the air of actuality and freshness, an understanding that led him to write

AUGUST

Stand forth the Champions of your Country's cause,
Nor fear the traitors aided by their laws,
Exalt the shady buckler to the war,
Aided by heav'n, no human prowess fear,
For those who, in the front of battle, dare
Fight hand to hand, and bear the brunt of war,

SEPTEMBER

But rarely fall—Though dastards skulk behind,
The fate they shun still haunts the cow'rdly kind.
What mind can well conceive, or tongue relate,
The ills unnam'd that on the truant wait?
To shun his fate when from the field he flies,
Pierc'd from behind th' inglorious coward dies,
When prone he lies, and gasping on the ground,
What shame to see behind the gaping Wound!

Ames' verses, taken together with the literature of the period, make remarkably interesting reading which acquire as we finish the last lines more significance than we may have felt when we began with the first. Out of them comes the indisputable fact that their concern with people and their ideas of freedom demonstrate their value to the historian. The foregoing is fragmentary, but the deficiency should not blind us to the fact that it suggests an analysis from evidence seldom used.

## 2. PRINTING, POTIONS, PILLS AND MAXIMS

It is not the purpose here to discuss at length the physical qualities of eighteenth century almanacs, nor to suggest that publications of today should be studied against the background of printing in early America. These notes are designed to suggest new lines of research, rather than to treat the subject in exhaustive fashion. The almanacs in the Rutgers collection furnish a field for research in a variety of disciplines, and throw light upon printing in the country's beginnings.

Many an early almanac was produced by one man (often a craftsman who was proud to be known as a printer). The first almanac in America, entitled *An Almanack Calculated for New England*, was published in Cambridge in 1639 by Stephen Daye. The first regularly published annual was followed by similar publications in Boston, then in Philadelphia and elsewhere, all before 1708. By 1700 there were eighty almanacs printed in Massachusetts, and these constituted four-fifths of the nonofficial and nonreligious literature of the time.

The almanac contained not only astronomical calendars but compendiums of popular science, notices of remarkable events and dates, problems, proverbs, jests and practical information of various kinds, illuminated by illustrations. The same type faces that were used for newspapers were used for almanacs—the same line widths, the same presses, the same kinds of ink and the same kinds of paper. Up to about the middle of the nineteenth century most newspapers were printed on paper made from rags. Such paper was quite expensive, and, moreover the paper-makers were finding it difficult to meet the demands for rag paper. Readers of almanacs were frequently urged to bring clean rags to the printer. Outside of the Bible and the news-

paper, the almanac was the only printed matter found in most colonial families.

Advertisements were usually of the legal notice variety with an occasional illustration. The annuals carried notices about false teeth (not to be taken out at night). Soon there were also cure-alls to be advertised, and medicines for sale. These were often set solid, though with a larger initial letter. Shortage of paper encouraged printers to be parsimonious with white space—thus without any illustrations we have this advertisement: "Steel spring or jointed trusses for cure of ruptures, easy to new-born infants and effectual for the aged." Hutchins made his readers familiar with potions and lotions such as "The Princely Beautifying Lotion—no words can sufficiently express its virtues."

No advertising was to be solicited as such, but columns were open to medicinal remedies and practical information as a service to the reader. "An Almanac of 1782" testified that cures for baldness had made considerable progress in the world. America was set apart by Providence itself for this worldly prescription: "Rub that part morning and evening with onions 'till it is red and rub it afterwards with honey." All-purpose medicines appealed to others as the best way to overcome bodily ills. Convinced to his dying day that he had the germ of an idea Hutchins in his almanac for 1769 accepted, *a priori*, the general theories of the cause of disease and then applied the specific which seemed logical. His "Poor-Man's Medicine" appealed to a widely-dispersed readership who had few and bad roads and who relied much on self-treatment. With increasing frequency he offered a cure-all which doubtless had a greater reputation for originality than competency. The prescription was no more than this:

> Boil four ounces of quick silver in two quarts of water in a glazed pipkin, until half is wasted; bottle it for use. The quick silver will serve again, as often as you want a fresh supply of liquor. The medicine is as insipid in taste, and as safe in using, as so much simple water. Many and various are the virtues of this single and simple medicine, when both externally and internally tried; wherefore I recommend it to destroy worms, to cure all impurities of the skin, to purify the blood, heal ulcers, open obstructions, and scour the glands. Drink it freely as a diet drink, and as much and as often as you please.

In his publication Hutchins added this testimonial: "A young man, who had a very bad scald head from five years old, was lately cured

by this medicine." At about the same time the almanac-makers, concerned as they were with experimental techniques, popularized this "remedy" for piles: "Take the duck-meat that lies upon pools and ditches, let it lie till it be dry, then lay it to the part; it cures immediately."

In still other ways the chroniclers continued to employ folk notions such as heralding a cure for hoarseness ("Rub the soles of the feet before the fire, with garlick and lard, well beaten together, over night," in Daniel George's almanac for 1782) and straining credulity by commending the proper means of snuffing out St. Anthony's Fire ("Drink a pint of sea-water every morning for seven days. It seldom fails," also in Daniel George.) With increasing frequency in the last four decades of the eighteenth century individual almanacs addressed themselves to a utilitarian application of knowledge for self-treatment of ills: medicines for chin-cough, sore throats, fits in children, the "inveterate" headache, apoplexy and just plain giddiness. Cancer was the subject of interest and observation; and most of the almanacs suggested using cold baths or applying poultices of wild parsnips or goose-dung.

On the other hand, factual knowledge did make advance, examples of which are to be found in the better publications. Thus, Ames gives some useful advice in 1759 on rules concerning the prevention of sickness in army camps. Observing that more soldiers died in camp than in battle, Ames took an empirical inquiry into the occasion of such catastrophe. In accepting, modifying and extending knowledge he showed once more that he was sophisticated in matters relating to science. To maintain good health in camp

> I would advise . . . every Soldier, First, to keep Clean, that the foul rancid Matter lodged in his Cloaths by Sweat and Perspiration, may be done away by frequent Ablution. Secondly, if no Sauce can be had with their meat, but what comes from the mealy Kind of Vegetable substances, let it be so managed by Cookery as to prevent the use of Meat more than once a Day. Thirdly, if Cyder or Vinegar can be procur'd use it freely: But if neither of them can be had, every man at an easy lay, may procure Sweet Spirits Nitre, or even cranberries eaten raw, sufficient to acidulate his common drink, and make a sort of artificial Cyder, which will be found very serviceable.

Nor should it be forgotten that the almanacs familiarized their readers with current scientific theories. Some supported, against the opposition of Boston's medical fraternity, the new movement for

inoculation against smallpox. In his almanac for 1775, for example, Ames showed himself to be well-informed in both political history and the new science. He set forth a conception of inoculation for smallpox which anticipated Jenner:

> The *Circassian* women have, from time immemorial communicated the small-pox to their children, when not above six months old by making an incision in the arm: and by putting into the incision a pustle taken from the body of another child, this pustle produces the same effect in the arm it is laid in as yest in a piece of dough: It ferments and diffuses thro' the whole mass of blood the qualities it is impregnated with.

Simple American humor, which vied with remedies for the reader's attention, was also tucked in the columns of the almanacs—in these above all were to be found stories that reflected the homespun wit of the day. Thus this "cure for the flux" made the rounds of the publications at about the time of the Revolution: "A Gentleman coming out of a certain coffee-house, complained, with a volley of oaths, that he had a violent flux; a Quaker, overhearing him shrewdly said: 'Swear on friend, oaths are binding.' " And to it must be added the low laughs of the tavern, a humor which criticized man's failings; as reported in Nathaniel Low's almanac for 1777:

> Says Collin, in Rage, contradicting his Wife
> "You never yet told me one Truth in your life."
> Vex'd Fanny, no way could this thesis allow,
> "You're a Cuckold," says she, "Do I tell the truth now?"

He who searches for jests that made America laugh will turn to the almanac-makers, such as Father Abraham for 1773:

> EPITAPH ON A LARGE PHYSICIAN
> Take heed, O good traveller!
> And do not tread hard;
> For here lies Doctor Stratford,
> In ALL the church-yard.

It cannot be said that Poor Roger wrote poetry of vigorous and imaginative quality, but he was sometimes able to illustrate by vivid, incongruous caricatures in a curious admixture of humor. I think I cannot do better than give here an example from his annual of 1766:

> THE MISTAKE
> A Cannon Ball, one bloody day,
> Took a poor Sailor's legs Away!
> And, as on his comrades back he made off

A second fairly took his head off.
The fellow, in this odd emergence,
Carries him back to the surgeons.
Z——ds! cries the doctor, are you drunk,
To bring me here a headless trunk?
A lying dog! cries Jack—he said
His leg was off, and not his head.

Quite apart from the crudity of the humor, how good it is! Take, for example, this epigram from Hutchins' almanac for 1769:

Says Epicure Quin, 'Sould the D——l in H——l
In fishing for Men take Delight.
His hook bait with Venison, I love it so well
By G— I am sure I should bite.

The almanacs also were a source of homely wisdom for the farmer; and from these maxims it is possible to make shrewd guesses about the schemes for self-regulation and the value system that obtained among ordinary Americans. The traits thus venerated are those of personal merit and cultivation, of great ambition and steadfast application, of sobriety of character and sternness of purpose, which are qualities that quite patently have found their reward in American society. The identifying traits stressed by the almanac-makers are sometimes thought to be representative, at least desired, characteristics of Americans. In many ways the members of the so-called middle class today reflect the energy and resourcefulness, the strong accent upon individualism, the drive for upward mobility, the self-discipline, and the ascetic morality which are thought to have been qualities of the men and women who founded and developed the American nation. Thus it may be that the numberless maxims that made virtues of self-help and self-reliance are the center of gravity, or the sustaining balance, of American society.

Supporting and rationalizing the society are certain configurations—working rules or moral principles—which motivate behavior at the level of the culture. Among the tenets which I have drawn from the almanacs are the following assertions:

1. Every individual should strive to better himself, and to get ahead in life. This doctrine is assumed to be a law of nature, to be imbedded in ultimate reality. Human existence, it holds, is a constant struggle for the limited means to sustain life, and everyone must fend aggressively for himself and his own. In America the harshness

of the struggle for existence compels each person to be constantly alert to his own interests, and promote them when he can. If he does not look to his own self-advantage, then assuredly no one else will. *If you would thrive, first contrive & then strive. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.*

2. An individual can advance in life if he demonstrates character, self-discipline, application, health and perhaps some luck in aggressively seeking success. There are times when he will be defeated by the vicissitudes of nature, to be sure, but since virtue has it own reward, he will fashion his own success if his merit warrants it. Often the road to fortune is arduous and uphill, but the individual should take courage, according to this tenet, from the recognition that there is always room on the top for a good man. *Adversity makes a wise man. Many complain of bad Times, but take no care to become better themselves. Adversity makes a man wise. Imitate Jesus and Socrates. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing. Get what you can and what you get hold.*

3. Everyone tends, in the final analysis, to find a place which approximates the measure of his abilities. Eventually the meritorious ascend to the top, and the less able distribute themselves downward from this eminence. The poor huddle at the bottom of the heap because, perhaps unwittingly, they have willed to remain there. *Let the Poor be content with their present Lot, for when they come to make Brick without straw, their case will be yet worse. All men are by nature equal, But differ greatly in the sequel. 'Tis as truly Folly for the Poor to ape the Rich, as for the Frog to swell, in order to equal the Ox.*

Finally, it may be said, the maxims in the almanacs suggest that the ascension of each rung of the social class ladder brings the individual one step closer to success and happiness. Were this not so, and were the upward struggle not finally to eventuate in the good life, then the hard grind would not be worth the effort, and mortal existence would be nothing but a grisly irony. But the rich and the powerful enjoy a considerable felicity, this view is confident, and their bliss is to be coveted by all men. Then too, the final goal of all human endeavor is to achieve progress or perfection, and when these come into sight happiness, also, is within reach of plucking.